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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an instrument used to assess the receptive language of children. The bilingual child is tested first in the non-dominant language. When the ceiling is reached in the non-dominant language, the tester switches to the dominant language. (The ideal situation would be to give the test in one language one day, then repeat the test in the other language some days later. However, the logistics of testing young children and other factors make this alternative less practical.) The test consists of three parts: (1) Parent's Report; (2) Vocabulary; and (3) Performed Task. In the Parent's Report portion, the child is given 12 tasks to perform such as turning off the light, saying bye-bye, etc. This portion is designed to gather data and to provide a setting in which the child can observe the friendly interaction of the mother and the tester. The vocabulary portion consists of four parts: (1) identification of four common items which are found in the home; (2) identification of objects from the test kit; (3) identification of two similiar objects; and (4) identification of objects by use. The third portion (Performed Task) consists of 47 items in which the child should demonstrate that he/she understands the instruction for each task. (CFM)

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The Description of an Instrument to Assess the Receptive Language of Monolingual or Bilingual (Spanish/English) Children 12 to 36 Months of Age*

Edward J. Mazeika

This instrument is a research edition which was developed while the author was employed as Language Coordinator for the Parent-Child Development Center of the U. of Houston--a project which dealt exclusively with low-income Mexican-American families (Johnson, Leler, et al., 1974). At present norms exist only for this group.

The assessment of receptive language in young children is based on the work of U. Bellugi, J. Marmor, C. E. Myers, et al., Bud White, Brown and Fraser, and the author's own research. The measurement of two linguistic systems by means of the same instrument is based on the author's research with a bilingual (Spanish/English) child (Mazeika, 1970). This research has shown that Roman Jakobson's claim that phonological acquisition follows a definite developmental sequence, in terms of categories and relative chronology, also holds true for the developmental sequence of grammatical features both within the same child (intra-linguistic) and between two children (inter-linguistic); i.e., Ruth Weir's study Language in the Crib was replicated with a bilingual child. This enabled the author to compare the English of Anthony Weir with the English and Spanish of Carlito Pena, then to compare Carlito's English and Spanish.

Because of the difficulty involved in testing young children, something needs to be said about how the test is administered. (1) The single most important aspect of early childhood testing is to find a "good" time to test the child; a time when he or she is not sleepy, tired, or sick. (2) The testing is done in the home with the mother or caretaker present during the entire testing period. (3) A potential source of interference during testing is the presence of siblings, especially the next oldest child; therefore, an attempt should be made to separate the siblings from the test situation. (4) The tester should try to arrange things so that the contents of the test kit will not be visible. It was found that sitting on a sofa with the child between the tester and mother, and with the test kit behind the tester, is a good arrangement because the test kit is easy to reach, yet out of sight of the child. (5) It was found that some children, especially younger children, do not want to be disturbed once they have begun to "play". Our testers found that distraction is the most effective way to deal with this problem, e.g., diverting the child's attention, preferably with the next test item,

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* The author welcomes any assistance in the establishment of norms or any legitimate use of the test. For a copy of the manual and test write to the author c/o Dept. of English, Morningside College, Sioux City, IA 51106.

then quickly removing the other object. Because some items are highly attractive, we eliminated or modified some items that other tests use, e.g., a ball of aluminum foil instead of a regular ball.

The tester begins the testing in the non-dominant language first (Language dominance is determined prior to the testing by means of a Bilingual Inventory which provides an estimate of who speaks to whom in which language or dialect in a bilingual home-Appendix A). Once the ceiling is reached in the non-dominant language, the tester switches to the dominant language beginning with the first item missed. The assumption here (to be discussed later) is that all of the items up to this point are known in both languages.

The tester should give all of the instructions to the child; however, if the tester does not know the language or dialect, then the mother (or someone else) presents the test items. Further, the tester makes it a point to explain that he or she should be corrected if the directions to the child are not given in the way the child is usually spoken to in the home. (One of the major reasons for the tester giving the directions is to avoid the use of gestures.)

Directions to the child may be given 2 or 3 (or more) times before going on to the next item; or, an item may be suspended and attempted later.

Testing Kit

The test kit contains a fairly large number of items, e.g., a spoon, pencils, keys, buttons, 3 blue cards wrapped with yellow yarn, table, dog, and most important, a doll family with flexible arms and legs; father, mother, boy, girl, and a baby. (See Appendix B for a complete list of test items.)

The test itself consists of three parts: Vocabulary, Parent's Report, and Performed Task.

Parent's Report Only

Twelve items in this portion are given to children below 20 mos. of age. It is designed to accomplish two things at once: 1) gather test data, and 2) provide a setting in which the child can observe the mother and tester interact in a friendly manner.

Some of the items in this section are: Come here, Ven/Vente; Clap your hands/Play pat-a-cake, Aplaude/Haz tortillas; Say bye-bye, Dile "bai"/Dile adios; Turn off the light, Prende/apaga la luz.

Vocabulary

The vocabulary portion consists of four parts: (1) The Identification of Four Common Items. Here the tester asks the mother to lend her a spoon, shoe, glass or cup, and a plate. The objects are pooled, then the child is asked to identify each, e.g., Where is the _____? or Show me the _____? or Point to the _____. As each object

is identified, it is returned to the object pool, e.g., if the child hands the object to the tester. (2) The second portion consists of objects similar to the above objects. These are in the test kit. The objects are placed in an object pool and the previous process is repeated. (3) The third portion consists of objects from outside the home. Here the task is to identify two similar objects, e.g., two pencils, two keys, two purses, and two buttons. (4) Identifying Objects by Use. This portion consists of a card with 6 miniature objects attached--similar in format to the Stanford-Binet. The child is asked to identify the object we use to: fly in, eat with, buy bubble gum with, cook with, wash with, and write with.

Performed Task

The next portion consists of 47 items in which the child should demonstrate that he/she understands the instructions for each task, e.g., Take the button off the cup. However, if the child does not perform the required task, the tester has the option of asking the mother if she knows that the child does understand. If such is the case, the tester can report this in a Parent's Report column. (We examined the accuracy of mothers' reports and found that most are consistent in their reporting. Originally the test was in two parts. On Part I (1-2 yrs.) we found a test-retest reliability on Parent's Report only of .69 ($>.05$); Part II .92 ($>.01$).)

Following is a random sample of some test items:

1. Ask C to open or close the door.

   Abre la puerta.
   Sierra la puerta.

   Open the door.
   Close the door.

7. When C is in standing position, ask C to raise one foot.

   Levanta tu pie.

   Lift (raise) your foot.

12. Ask C to point to his own head:

    Apunta a tu cabeza.

    Point to your head.

19. Place a ball, spoon, pencil, and keys in front of C and ask:

    Dame el botón y el lápiz.

    Give me the button and the pencil.

25. Using the same set-up as before tell the C:

Dale al niño grande la cuchara chiquita.

Give the big boy the little spoon.

26. Arrange two pairs of dolls in front of C. Each pair should have one doll standing and another sitting. Ask C to:

a. Ensename una muñeca que esta sentada.

b. Ensename una muñeca que no esta sentada.

a. Show me a doll that is sitting.

b. Show me a doll that is not sitting.

31. Pon el nino junto a (al lado de) la silla.

Put the little boy next to the chair.

34. Arrange buttons in two groups; one button in one group and three in the other. Ask C:

a. Dame el botón.

(Return the button to its original position before asking part b.)

b. Dame los botones.

a. Give me the button.

b. Give me the buttons.

40. Replace all 3 sticks before C then ask:

Dame dos palos que son del mismo color.

Give me two sticks that are the same color.

43. Arrange two cups and one box in a row about 2 inches apart (with the cups next to each other). Give C a button and say:

Pon el botón entre(en medio de) la taza y la caja.

Put the button between the cup and the box.

Scoring

Scoring is rather complex. The test produces 5 different scores: vocabulary, performed task, parent's report the percent of Spanish understood, and the percent of English understood.

With the exception of the bilingualism score, any item receives only one point credit. Although it is the case that only one language is used for any one item, in practice the tester will ask the mother if she feels that a certain item is known in the other language, e.g., in a bilingual home "shoe" is often used instead of "zapato". *

The bilingualism score reveals three aspects: (1) the % of Spanish understood, (2) the % of English understood, and (3) the % of items understood in both languages.

Statistical Findings

The following statistical operations were performed on the test when it was still divided into two parts until an item analysis could be performed. An item analysis has been performed and all of the items are now in order of difficulty.

The statistical operations are as follows:

1. Inter-observer reliability
   Average percent of agreement = 98.4% N = 8
2. Test-retest reliability on Part I (12-24 mos.)
   Combined total score r= .73 (>.01) N = 11
3. Test-retest reliability on Part II (24-36 mos.)
   Combined total score r = .91 (>.01) N = 11
4. Correlation between Combined Total Score and age = .81 N = 119 (See Appendix C for Scattergram).
5. Correlation between Combined Total Score and Stanford-Binet I.Q. score = .31
6. Correlation between Combined Total Score and Palmer's Concept Familiarity Index = .28

(Note: Correlation between Stanford-Binet and Concept Familiarity Index = .67)

* The author's research suggests that one of the advantages of being bilingual is that the bilingual child has available two lexicons. Since ease of articulation is an important factor in the child's expressive language, the research suggests that certain concepts are more readily encoded in the language in which the word is easier to pronounce. For example, Anthony Weir never used the word "these" whereas Carlito did use "eses" in both Spanish sentences and hybrid sentences, e.g., "Go in the boat con esa Daddy" (note use of "con" instead of "with") or "Eses pongalo nenes" [Put the cars on these (blocks)]. "Nenes" is a nursery form for cars.

Discussion

One of the major theoretical problems which exists herein is the assumption that all of the items presented in the non-dominant language until a ceiling is reached are also known in the dominant language. This problem is part of the far greater problem posed by Paul Kolers (1969), i.e., in the bilingual person, what is the nature of the mental operations involved in the acquisition, storage and retrieval of information and concepts.

In a series of creative experiments with adults, Kolers, in answer to the above questions, concluded that "some information can be stored in such a way that it is readily accessible in either of two languages. Other information is, in terms of its accessibility, closely bound to the language by which it is stored in the mind" (Kolers, 1969, p. 83). It would seem that the same conclusion might be drawn for bilingual children; however, to this writer's knowledge, almost no comparable data exists for bilingual children.*

The situation is further complicated by the fact that the test situation may provide for one-trial learning in one language, e.g., Slobin cites some of the Russian research which found that "Lyamina (1958) reports that . . . her subjects (ages 1,8 to 2,1) were not better at naming familiar, everyday objects than they were at naming objects whose names were taught in an experimental setting without the opportunity to manipulate them; apparently the important variable was the child's attention to the new object." (Slobin, 1966, p. 144). Another Russian researcher, Mallitskaya, concludes that " 'even at the age of twelve to thirteen months (word-image) connections can be formed under some conditions after a single reinforcement. The most important condition for developing these connections is the presence on an intense orienting reaction to the named image, as is the case where a new image is placed among other images whoe names the child already knows' (1960, p. 126)." (Slobin, 1966, p. 145)

Thus the situation arises that for some test items the child may learn the test item in one language during the testing situation, and, if asked to respond to the same item in another language, may be responding to the situational context, e.g., one of the test items measures the understanding of the preposition on the other side by placing a picture of a girl face down and asking, "Show me the picture of the girl on the other side."

Once this task was performed in response to directions in one language, it would be erroneous to assume that the item is known in the other language, i.e., if we adhere to the direction that all items known in the non-dominant language are assumed also to be known in the

* The author did discover one striking correspondence between his data with a bilingual child and Kolers' data with adults, i.e., Kolers found that approximately 1/5 of the test responses were readily available in either of the languages being examined in adult bilinguals; this author found that 21% of the words in the bilingual child's vocabulary were cognates, e.g., moon/la luna.

dominant language; or, if the tester decides to repeat the item in the other language, it would be difficult to determine if the child is responding to the directions in the other language or merely to the situational context.

In view of the above, the following alternatives arise:

(1) Continue to test in the manner described, i.e., assume that all items are known in both languages when the ceiling is reached in the non-dominant language, then in only one language for the remainder of the test.

(2) Present each item in one language, then immediately repeat that same item in the other language.

(3) Give the entire test in one language first, then repeat immediately in the other language.

(4) Give the test in one language one day, then repeat the test in the other language some days later.

The ideal situation seems to be the last; however, the logistics of testing young children and other factors, e.g., making appointments, testing in the home, avoiding tiring the child, differences in developmental stages at different testing times argues for the retention of the first alternative for the present.

In conclusion, it seems to this writer that, compared to the study of monolingual children, the study of bilingual children places into sharper focus the complex problems involved in determining the interrelationship between cognitive, affective, and linguistic structures in the acquisition of language.

Finally, this instrument and the assumption upon which it was developed, i.e., that two or more languages develop in a parallel manner in the same person, suggests strongly that any two (or more) languages may be assessed by employing the methodology described herein.

Appendix A

NAME

DATE

INTERVIEWER

Names and Ages of Children	Father	Mother												Maternal Grandparents	Paternal Grandparents	Other Family Members
Father ( )																
Mother ( )																
( )																
( )																
( )																
( )																
( )																
( )																
( )																
( )																
( )																
( )																
Maternal Grandparents																
Paternal Grandparents																
Other Family Members																

INSTRUCTIONS

1. This form is to determine how much Spanish is used in the home.
2. First print the names of family members on the left and top; go from oldest to youngest with the children; write ages in ( ).
3. To record this information, always begin at the left and say to yourself, "A speaks to B in Spanish _____"; then record one of the following:

Never

Sometimes - Less than half the time in Spanish.

Often - About half English and half Spanish.

Mostly - Most or more than half the time in Spanish

Always

BILINGUAL INVENTORY

Lugar de nacimiento del padre. _____ Edad _____
Father's place of birth _____ Age _____

Educación _____ ¿Dónde? _____
Education _____ Where" _____

Lugar de nacimiento de la madre _____ Edad _____
Mother's place of birth _____ Age _____

Educación _____ ¿Dónde? _____
Education _____ Where" _____

Preguntas a la madre:
Questions to the mother:

¿Cuánto tiempo tiene usted de hablar inglés?
How long have you been speaking English" _____

¿Cómo aprendió a hablar inglés?
How did you learn to speak English? _____

¿Cuánto tiempo tiene su esposo de hablar inglés?
How long has your husband been speaking English" _____

¿Con cuántas personas diferentes les ha hablado usted en inglés
How many different persons have you spoken to in English during

durante la semana pasada?
the past week? _____

¿Tiene su esposo que hablar inglés en su trabajo?
Does your husband have to speak English at work? _____

Si es afirmativa, preguntale:¿Cuánto inglés habla, más o menos?
If affirmative, ask: About how much of the time? _____

¿Piensa usted que su español es tan bueno como él de otras
Do you feel that your Spanish is better than or worse than other

personas?
kinds of Spanish? _____

¿Porqué piensa esto?
Why do you think so? _____

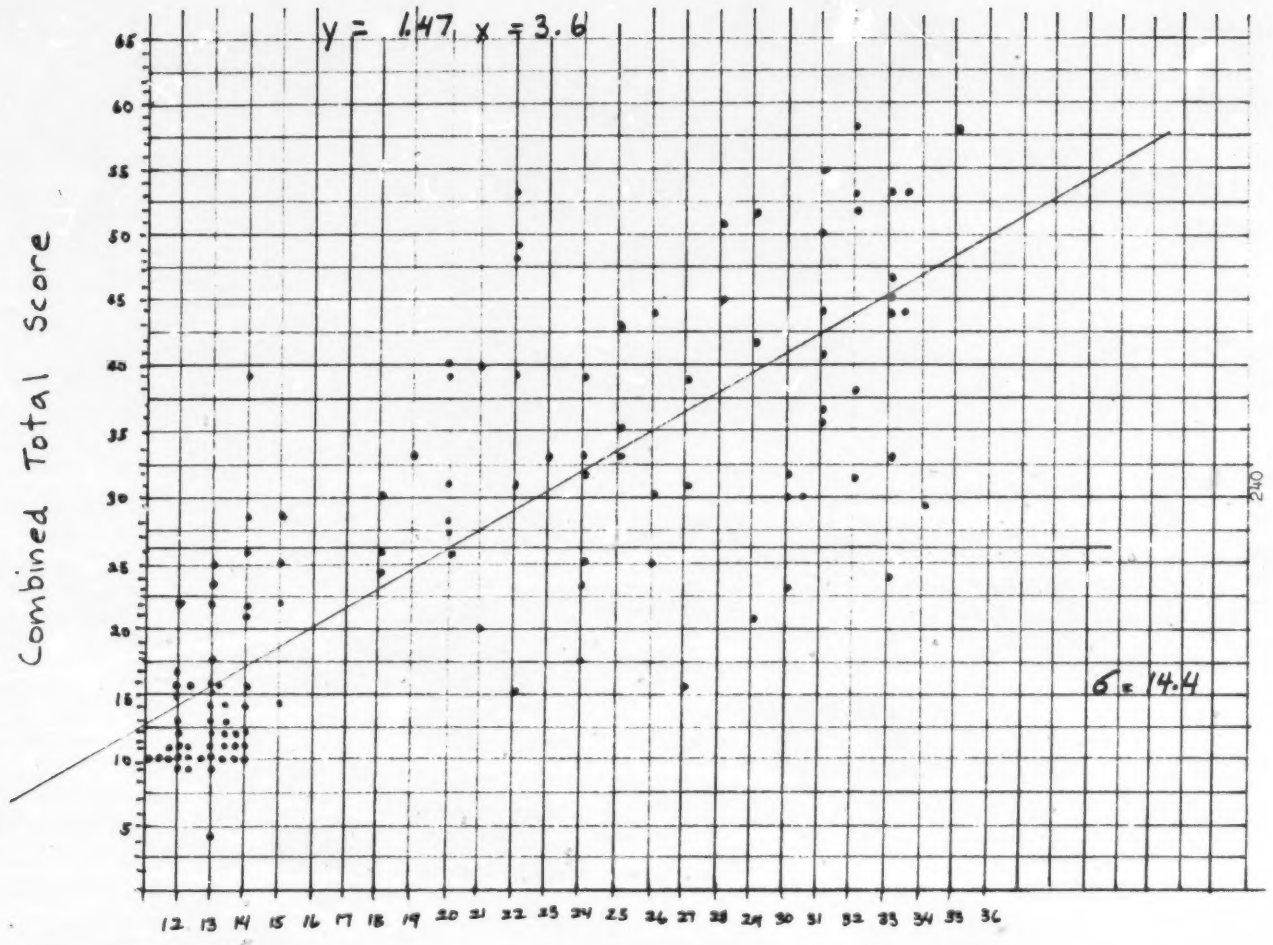
Información adicional:
Additional information: _____

_____

_____

List of Items Needed for Administering The Receptive Language Inventory

spoon
doll shoe
plastic drinking glass
toy plastic plate
2 pencils
2 sets of keys
2 coin purses
6 assorted buttons
card displaying 6 items:
    a. airplane
    b. frying pan
    c. soap
    d. penny
    e. fork
    f. pencil
several tiny rubber bands
3 blue cards wrapped with yellow yarn
card showing pictures of 2 edible and 2 inedible items
3 sticks: 1 short blue stick
1 long blue stick
1 longer, thinner orange stick
pocket-sized pack of tissues
1 wiping cloth
three inch ball of aluminum foil
drawing of a little girl
toy bull
toy fence
toy table
toy dog
toy chair
toy spoon
smaller toy spoon
tiny toy comb
2" x 2" box
doll family
    a. father
    b. mother
    c. boy
    d. girl
    e. baby



Scattergram for Bilingual Receptive Language Inventory

Appendix C